

CUTLER

Building village pride

By Christi Mathis
Southern Illinoisan Correspondent

Though generally quiet these days, life hasn't always been that way in Cutler, a village of 500 people in southwest Perry County.

Cutler is on Illinois 150 in an area known as "Lost Prairie," named because some of George Rogers Clark's soldiers got lost in the area en route to Kaskaskia from Vincennes, Ind.

Enoch Eaton built Cutler's first house in 1825. The land on which the town is built was willed to the village by the Rev. Michael Harshaw, who stipulated that no tavern be in the village or the property would revert to the Harshaw heirs.

Although the stipulation is too old to be enforced, Cutler remains a dry town and a two-thirds vote of the population would be required to change that.

Cutler was named after Cutler Dawson, the builder of Tamaroa, Chester and Western Railroad — now the Missouri-Pacific — that goes through Cutler. The town was incorporated Feb. 25, 1873.

Resident Everett McClure farmed 220 acres about three miles outside of town for many years before he sold his land to the Captain Mine in 1950 and moved into the village.

He remembers when Cutler had many stores, gasoline stations and "a big creamery with the best ice cream in the area."

The Cutler Creamery operated from 1887 to 1963. It produced 100,000 gallons of ice cream and 300,000 pounds of butter a year, and distributed statewide during its peak.

The creamery burned down and the business was sold to an interest outside the area.

Other fires have hastened the town's misfortune by claiming the Anchor Flour Mill and the Smith Brothers Mill, which helped Cutler gain its status as a grain center. Neither mill was rebuilt.

Townpeople are quick to praise the friendliness of their neighbors and say they enjoy small-town life.

Village youngsters are bused to classes at Trico Community Unit School District. Cutler's former school building houses the city hall, post office, library, senior citizens center and a gymnasium that can be rented.

A large park with a baseball diamond and playground equipment is next to the building. The Jaycees have been improving the park playground, adding restrooms and a sand volleyball pit.

Consolidation Coal Co.'s Burning Star No. 4 Mine is just outside city limits and employs 236 hourly and 58 salaried employees.

But most of Cutler's residents work at either the Chester Mental Health Center, the Menard Correctional Center in Chester or Gilster-Mary Lee in Steeleville.

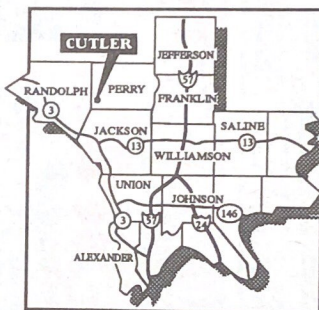
Unhappy with the decline of their community, townspeople have worked for several years to clean up the town under the leadership of Mayor Richard Gaetz.

The effort began shortly after Gaetz's election in 1989. He said then that besides beautification, the goal of the cleanup was to entice a gas station-convenience store to Cutler.

The effort succeeded. The Fleetwood II convenience store was built on the site of several closed businesses.



Protection: (Left to right) EMT Vicki Jones, paramedic Byron Neubauer and firefighters Brian Patterson, Wes Patterson (in truck), assistant chief Dan Holder and Capt. Ron McCoy serve the Cutler Fire Protection District and the Cutler Division of the Pinckneyville Ambulance Service.



Cutler

Date founded: Incorporated Feb. 25, 1873.

Name origin: Named for Cutler Dawson, builder of the Tamaroa, Chester and Western Railroad (now Missouri-Pacific).

Population: 500.

Highlights: Large city park; John Rednour Complex for senior citizens.

DU QUOIN

Working for stability

Du Quoin, Perry County's largest city, has sustained its share of major losses in recent years.

The Du Quoin Packing Co. closed with financial difficulties; United Electric Mine is closed and Charming Industries will shut down Oct. 1, causing the loss of 40 jobs. Countywide, August's 21.9 percent jobless rate continued to be the highest in the state.

But Mayor John Rednour and other officials see reason for optimism. The new General Henry Baking Co. plant is under construction, and state officials have finally given the go-ahead to opening a prison work camp on the grounds of the Du Quoin State Fair. Within recent weeks, the Perry County Board approved a siting permit for a large landfill/recycling center/composting facility to be built by Laidlaw Waste Systems Inc. between Du Quoin and Pinckneyville.

This year's Du Quoin State Fair, though shortened because of state financial problems, still managed to attract large crowds. And the fairground continues to be the site for the annual Street Machine Nationals, which brings thousands of people to Du Quoin.

"One thing we can be proud of is our industrial park and a new tenant. The steel should be arriving soon and hopefully General Henry will be in business by the first of November," Rednour said.

Earlier this year, the city received a \$652,400 grant to develop the new industrial park. The grant, combined with about \$160,000 in city money, is paying for construction of an access road and extension of water and sewer lines to the 60-acre park, located at the city's border with the village of St. Johns.

He also noted the city has applied for a \$150,000 loan from the state Department of Commerce and Community Affairs for Chem-Line, Inc., which would use the money to ex-

One thing we can be proud of is our industrial park and a new tenant. The steel should be arriving soon and hopefully General Henry will be in business by the first of November.

John Rednour, mayor

pand into full production.

The firm, which opened last year, manufactures a tire self-sealant that has military and commercial applications. If the loan is approved, Chem-Line would be able to expand and would employ about 31 people. If Chem-Line expands, it will move into the old Pepsi building on U.S. 51 north. The company has been headquartered in a structure across the street.

General Henry currently leases the Pepsi building during construction of its cookie factory in the industrial park.

"It's just fighting for jobs for Du Quoin," Rednour said. "I get a little bit disappointed with the 22 percent unemployment, but all you can do is keep fighting."

There are other signs of movement. A new 300,000-gallon water tower will be built this fall.

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Du Quoin Ford-Mercury will go that extra mile in striving to make customers satisfied with the purchase of a new or used car or truck; maintenance and repair on their car. The automobile dealership offers small, hometown, friendly service.

Du Quoin Ford-Mercury was purchased in 1990 by Colleen Robinson. Du Quoin Ford is the only Ford dealer in Perry County and one of the few owned by a female.

Colleen guarantees the staff "will go that extra mile to make our customers happy." Their local staff treats every customer as a potential lifetime purchaser by communicating a professional image that embraces honesty and concern for the customer's wants and needs. Customers sense the "family attitude" prevalent among Du Quoin Ford's staff of twenty.

The dealership is located at 19 North Division in Du Quoin.

Hours are from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday; 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday; and 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday.

Phone # is 542-3838.

Du Quoin

FORD-MERCURY INC.



Positive view: Du Quoin Mayor John Rednour stands in the downtown area. He says his top priority is getting people back to work.

Du Quoin

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He also noted the city will finally get the railroad overpass it has been trying to secure for decades. Last spring, city officials learned the Illinois Department of Transportation had approved the release of \$250,000 for consulting and engineer work on the overpass over the Illinois Central tracks. The entire project is expected to cost between \$3.5 million and \$4 million. Construction is slated for 1994.

Like many other Southern Illinois communities, Du Quoin's origins date to the laying of Illinois Central Railroad tracks.

But before Du Quoin there was Old Du Quoin.

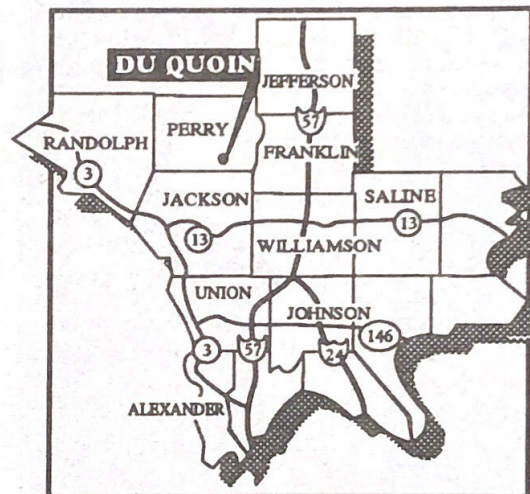
That community was officially laid out in 1844 by Avery Chapman and platted by surveyor Amos Webster.

Eleven years later, the railroad laid out the city of Du Quoin through its agents, I.S. Metcalf, and Chester A. Keyes.

The first buildings were erected by the railroad company — a freight and passenger depot, and a boarding house for the entertainment of railroad workers. The development of Du Quoin attracted residents and merchants from Old Du Quoin.

The city takes its name from Jean Baptist Ducoigne, the son of a Frenchman and a Tamara Indian woman.

By 1857, the population had increased enough to prompt city officials to call an elec-



Du Quoin

When founded: Laid out in 1855 by the Illinois Central Railroad.

Population: 6,697.

Name origin: Named for Jean Baptiste Ducoigne.

Highlights: The Du Quoin State Fair; December stroll.

tion for incorporation.

Coal mining became a leading industry in Du Quoin. The mines, mostly along the Illinois Central Railroad tracks, were owned by concerns such as the Du Quoin Star Coal Mining Co., Enterprise Coal and Coke Co., and the Sun Coal and Coke Co.

PINCKNEYVILLE

A town evolving

By Christi Mathis

Southern Illinoisan Correspondent

Like a kaleidoscope slowly rotated, Pinckneyville is constantly changing, say residents.

Gerre Luke, a Home Health Care nurse at Pinckneyville Hospital, said it seems that whenever one business closes another soon pops up in the same location. Thus the town never seems to quite "boom," yet neither does it die. It just evolves to keep pace with the times.

The town, whose motto is "the friendly little city," was created by the Legislature in 1827 to be county seat for the newly established Perry County.

The state itself was nine years old, and the Pinckneyville site was chosen for its central location in the county. The name was selected from an honor roll list the Legislature used in naming towns and counties.

The town's often mispronounced and misspelled name came from Col. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a Revolutionary War hero, South Carolina governor and Federalist candidate for president against Thomas Jefferson in 1804 and James Madison in 1808.

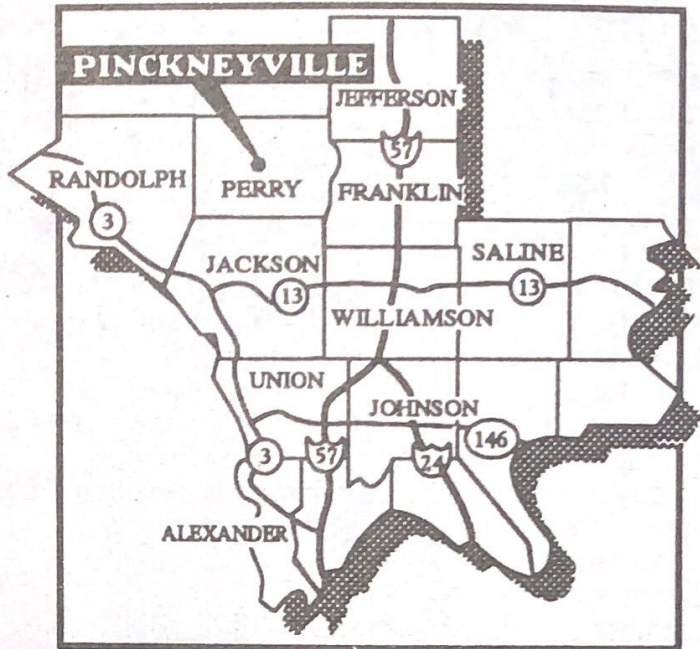
The city property was divided in lots and sold at public auction in February 1828, with 24 lots bringing in \$1,223.28.

The first county jail was built in Pinckneyville in 1833-34 for \$750. By then the village had grown to include two stores, a tavern, a grocery and many farmers.

Within a short time, two railroads, the Wabash, Chester and Western (now Missouri-Pacific) and the Belleville and Southern Illinois (now Illinois Central) ran through the town.

Some of Pinckneyville's favorite events have been around nearly as long as the town.

The Perry County Fair, the oldest continuous county fair in Illinois, celebrated its 135th year in July with typical events such as a demolition derby, a tractor pull and a motorcycle race. The fair is held at the Perry County



Pinckneyville

Founded: 1827.

Name origin: Col. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a Revolutionary War hero.

Population: 3,372.

Highlights: Oldest continuous county fair in Illinois (the Perry County Fair, 135 years); Mardi Gras.

Fair grounds amid what is purported to be the oldest oak grove in Illinois.

Another annual event in Pinckneyville is the Mardi Gras parade and festivities. The Halloween spectacle, the oldest of its kind in the Midwest, was introduced by the chamber of commerce in 1925. The parade features a local merchant disguised as Col. Pinckney, and about 100 participating groups.

Former chamber of commerce President

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Pinckneyville

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Marie Parkinson said 4,000 to 6,000 people watch the parade each year. Surrounding events include a queen contest, a flea market and a carnival.

The American Threshermen's Association Inc. moved its three-year-old Steam, Gas and Threshing Show to Pinckneyville in 1962 and crowds flock to the fairground the third weekend of each August for the opportunity to return to farming early American-style.

More recently, the Threshermen added a fall show the third weekend of each October. The chamber of commerce sponsors Pinckney Days in early summer, offering a flea market, quilt show, auction and other activities.

Historically, Pinckneyville's economy and labor force have revolved around farming and mining.

Mayor Joe Holder said farming is "the backbone of the county."

But throughout the years, town fathers have sought to keep the economy diversified. The chamber of commerce built an industrial shell building in 1952 for the Belco Fan Co. of St. Louis, providing financing through the sale of \$125,000 in WIF (When and If We Get the Money, We'll Pay You Back) notes to local citizens.

The Belco deal fell through, so the chamber went to work again and the building was sold to Penich and Ford, makers of Mighty Fine Pudding.

The process occurred again in 1957 when Decca Records, now MCA Manufacturing, was enticed to move to town by \$150,000 in local loans matched by money from Prudential Insurance Co. and Decca.

Perry Metals entered the scene in 1961 with the help of \$300,000 in local loans and \$40,000 in local donations.

The city continues to work to maintain and recruit industry, as evidenced by the city's 1988 purchase of the former Mighty Fine Pudding Plant from Nabisco for \$385,000. The building is now leased to MCA Manufacturing.

Perry Metals became US Gypsum and then GS Metals. MCA employs 400 people; GS employs 135.

Other major employers include Contempri Industries, Mobile Structures and the hospital.

The city recently purchased a 90-acre industrial park site east of the city and is trying to recruit industry for it. In recent months, also, the city bought nearly 200 acres at the west edge of the city for commercial and residential development.

In addition, Pinckneyville has a new industrial development committee and the city is in the process of creating a tax increment financing district.

Residents see a parallel between now and a half century ago.

"When the Pyramid mine shut down about 50 years ago, hundreds of miners were laid off, and somehow Pinckneyville survived. I see it happening again," said John Sheley, referring to recent layoffs in many mines. Sheley is the former owner and still part-time employee of the 118-year-old local weekly newspaper, The Democrat.

Dr. Al "Doc" Doughty, a retired veterinarian, author of the historical novel "No Peace for a Rebel" and owner of the Oxbow Bed and Breakfast Inn, said he believes the problem is "things don't just happen; somebody's got to do something."

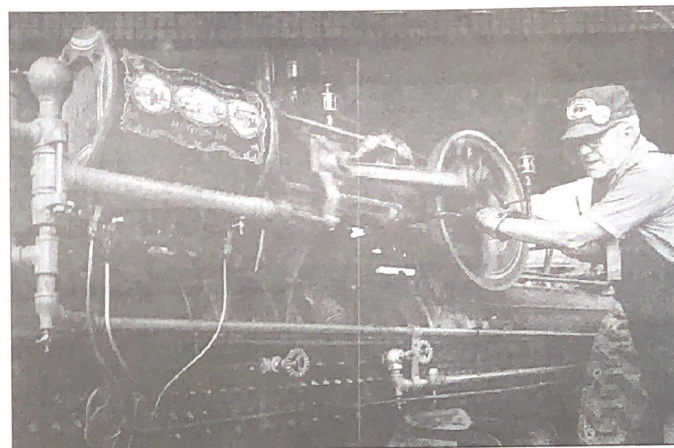
He praises the improved appearance of the town square in recent years, an area covered with locally owned businesses. Doughty said that even small contributions such as he made in developing two subdivisions and opening his inn help a community, and that others should get more involved.

Doughty believes the mining industry will "come back, I just don't know how long it will take."

Gerre Luke echoes that sentiment, but notes that while waiting people still have families to feed.

Parkinson, an attorney, said she has lived all over the country, but that "Pinckneyville is the only place I can leave my car running in the wintertime while I go into a store and come out and find my car and hub caps still there."

The friendliness of the locals is also praised. Doughty said that when he arrived in mid-



Threshermen's show: A Keck-Gonnerman steam engine is part of the annual Steam, Gas and Threshing Show held to commemorate farming, early-American Style.

1952, the residents "really made me feel at home."

Bonnie Rushing traveled with her husband, Marion, while he played professional football nine years with the Chicago and St. Louis Cardinals; the Atlanta Falcons, and the Houston Oilers before returning to his hometown 21 years ago.

She said she loves the town and "the friendliness and caring of the people. If I ever had to move I would really miss the way you can go down one street and wave at half a dozen people."

She insists that Pinckneyville is "the best town to raise kids in" and that it has lots of natural resources, such as Pyramid State Park. The 1,500-acre park on Illinois 152 southwest of town offers primitive camping, picknicking and fishing.

Some things never change though, and in Pinckneyville the unchangeable is basketball. The high school's basketball skills are legendary far beyond Southern Illinois.

The Pinckneyville Panther legend began with the hiring of Merrell "Duster" Thomas as coach in 1938. The team won several titles, but the year that really put Pinckneyville on the map was 1948.

The Panthers won the state championship and were featured in Sports Illustrated.

The 1948 team and coach were inducted into the Illinois High School Association Basketball Hall of Fame in March, and the high school gymnasium bears Thomas' name.

After Thomas retired in 1957, the legacy continued under various coaches, and still goes under coach Dick Corn.

One of Pinckneyville's self-proclaimed "biggest promoters" is the "Duchess," Virginia Marmaduke.

After spending 30 years in the "fast lane" of Chicago journalism, "rubbing shoulders" with the likes of Walt Disney, Jack Benny and Arthur Godfrey, Marmaduke retired 20 years ago to the hometown of her mother's ancestors.

ST. JOHNS



VFW Hall: Louise Fulton serves post quartermaster Robert L. Owens at the VFW Hall in St. Johns.

Holding steady

By Christi Mathis
Southern Illinoisan Correspondent

St. Johns, a village of 286 people on U.S. 51 at the northern edge of Du Quoin, was at one time a mecca for job-seekers, employing more people than have likely ever lived within its borders.

Surveyed and platted Sept. 13, 1856, the one-square-mile village straddles the Illinois Central Railroad line. It was incorporated in 1857, then unincorporated in 1883. It was again incorporated in 1903 by a vote of 73-30.

St. Johns was the site of one of the first, if not the first, slope coal mines to be sunk by the Illinois Central Iron and Coal Mining Co. in 1857. The mine was bought in 1867 by Capt. William Parker Halliday of Cairo, who sank a new slope mine in 1873 as well. The slope was an extraordinary 200 feet long as it sank 100 feet into the earth with its sides lined with bricks.

However, supposedly while searching for a better vein of coal in 1870 (some historians suspect Halliday was, in fact, searching for what he found), the drillers discovered salt water at 940 feet.

By the end of 1873 a salt works operation was in full swing. The works were at the site now occupied by WDN radio station. The original works produced daily up to 200 barrels of five grades of salt, with much of it shipped to the South.

A second salt works was built about 1900, and in all between 30 and 35 salt wells were sunk in the St. Johns area. One or more ponds remain that were once used to store saltwater.

Besides the coal mines and salt works, Halliday's operations included a 2,300-acre farm and altogether he employed about 350 men by the early 1880s.

Du Quoin history buff and former resident Robert Morefield, now of Murphysboro, said Halliday ran "a real operation" that was technologically advanced for its era.

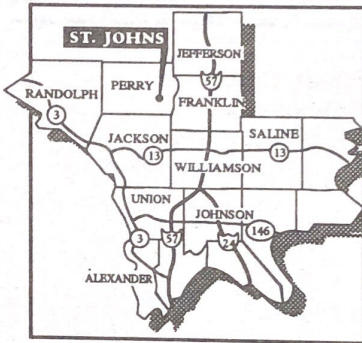
There was even a horse- or mule-draw trolley running down Du Quoin's Division Street and out to St. Johns daily to take people to work. The trolley shut down in the early 1890s.

"Halliday had one interest in life: to become wealthy. And he did it," Morefield said. Although remodeled through the years, the house owned by Halliday still graces Cherry Lake Road with its beauty.

Halliday died in 1899 and the salt works fell victim about 1906 to competition from larger operations.

St. Johns has been home to a knitting factory, a mill, a company general store and several coal mines, including the Eagle Mine. (The first Eagle Mine caved in, so another was sunk nearby and given the same name.)

The part of St. Johns on the east side of the railroad tracks acquired the name Eagletown, from the mine. The west side acquired the



St. Johns

Founded: Incorporated in 1857; later unincorporated, then incorporated again May 1, 1903.

Population: 286.

Highlights: Veterans of Foreign Wars building, Post 513, with nearly 500 post and auxiliary members.

name "Jacktown," reportedly after an otherwise unidentified "Captain Jack."

There was apparently a settlement of some size in the area before the village was first incorporated as St. Johns.

Village Clerk Dorothy Woodside recalls hearing that her great-grandfather used bricks made in St. Johns to build his house, until the brickyard closed about 1853.

The village, which encompasses parts of three Du Quoin rural routes, at one time had a grade school, which consolidated with Du Quoin about 1950.

Lifelong resident Helen Bunge, who has spent 73 years living on the same corner, also recalls when the village had a hotel, a post office, the Green Fan restaurant and a railroad roadhouse. She also remembers waiting at the tiny railroad depot, flagging down a train and catching a ride to visit friends in Tamaroa, or attending a church meeting in Elkhart.

Townfolk are quick to note that St. Johns is now home to a variety of businesses, including WDN radio, Perry County Ready-Mix, Kellerman's Radiator Shop, Marla Uhle's Drapery Den, R.J.'s Carpet, Porter's Foods and Rolando's Pizza. The town also boasts a new Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall, Post 513, which opened in late March 1990.

Porter's is apparently the village's largest employer, with 25 workers. The food distributor transports fresh and canned food, cleaning supplies, and paper and plastic products within a 60-mile radius, serving schools, hospitals, prisons and restaurants.

TAMAROA

Content with its role

By Christi Mathis

Southern Illinoisan Correspondent

Residents of Tamaroa, a village of 900 about eight miles north of Du Quoin, appear content with the town's evolution into a "bed-room community."

Like many other Southern Illinois communities, Tamaroa has had a colorful past. At one time it was a stop on the underground railroad, enabling runaway slaves to escape to freedom in the North.

First inhabited by the Tamaroa Indians, the area's first white inhabitants were the E.T. Rees family, who moved in 1815 to what is now Rees Creek.

The main settlement was just south of the modern village and was called Appleton.

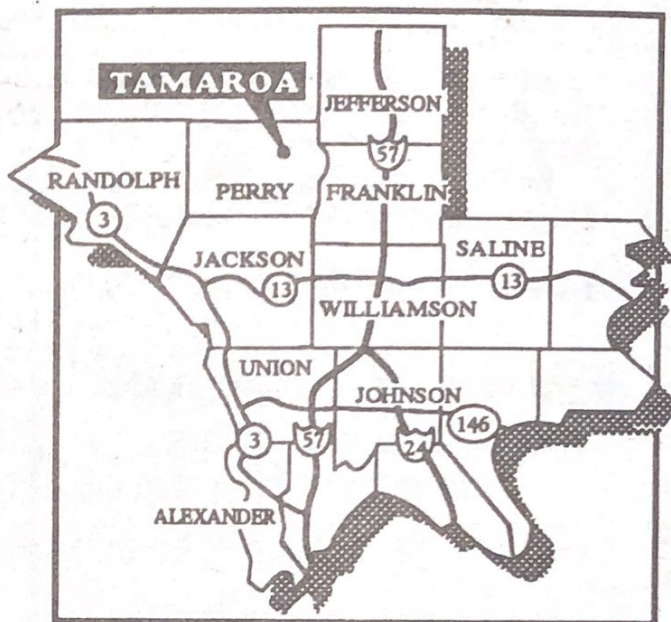
Local history buff Kenneth Stockton said that another large early settlement was about 2½ miles west of Tamaroa. Eventually the settlements combined and relocated to form Tamaroa in its present location.

Benajah Guernsey "B.G." Roots, an abolitionist, educator and farmer, was perhaps the most famous of Tamaroa's early citizens.

Roots arrived in 1839, and his third home, built between 1854 and 1856, was a stop on the underground railroad. Runaway slaves slipped through a secret passage found by removing bricks in a double wall between the house and the summer kitchen, and they hid in the root cellar in a fake cistern with fresh butter and eggs stored on top, supposedly to keep them cool.

Roots also built the first institution of higher learning in Southern Illinois, and his students included a Supreme Court justice and Gen. John A. Logan. Roots' 12-room home still stands and is the home of Calvin and Jean Ibendahl.

Roots' wife and her sister, Mrs. Nelson Holt, named the Illinois Central Railroad station when it was built during the 1850s, and the town adopted the name they chose.



Tamaroa

Incorporated: 1855.

Name origin: Named for the Tamaroa Indians (originally Kiawkashaw) who inhabited the area. Also called Tamarias.

Highlights: Children's Halloween parade; 16-acre park that includes a ball diamond.

Originally they called it Kiawkashaw, but the name was later changed to the easier-to-pronounce French version of the name Tamaroa, or Tammarias.

The village was platted and surveyed by the IC railroad in 1855 and was incorporated that year.

By the 1880s, the little farm and railroad community was on its way to becoming a mining town. The town boasted many underground mines during its heyday.

Tamaroa was "a pretty booming town at



Doing the wave: Sam Chapman waves to passersby from his part-time junk shop on U.S. 51.

► Tamaroa

Continued from Page 44

one time," Mayor Stanley Grott said.

In its early days the town was one of Southern Illinois' biggest farm trading centers, with hundreds of rail cars shipped out to major U.S. markets. Big geese and turkey sales brought thousands of birds to the town.

Herbert Adcock recalled that at one time Tamaroa's population was 1,800 to 2,000. Adcock, who was mayor from 1970-72, also recalls some of Tamaroa's racier times, such as visits by outlaw Charlie Birger.

Grott, who grew up about a mile north of the village, also recalls a visit to a mine tract of houses near his boyhood home by hooded Ku Klux Klan members. He said the KKK made at least one raid on the predominantly Italian bootlegging operation at the camp.

Tamaroa has shown its patriotism faithfully through the years, beginning with the formation of Perry County's first Civil War company after Abraham Lincoln gave the call to arms. Some Civil War veterans, and some of the village's earliest residents, are now buried in the historic Curlee Cemetery, about three miles north of Tamaroa.

The town's business district is now a shadow of its former splendor.

Earlier this century, the village boasted more

than 20 businesses, including five service stations and several clothing stores. Now, besides five churches, all that remains are a cafe, two beauty shops, a barbershop, a funeral home, two taverns, Ray's Auto Body, two small groceries and Taylor Brothers Welding and Machine Shop. Kasey's, a new convenience store, opened on U.S. 51 this summer.

Residents are especially proud of Taylor Brothers, a longtime local business that works on mine machinery and employs about 40 people.

To a great extent though, Tamaroa has now become "a bedroom community for other towns," said Jean Ibendahl.

But that's not all bad, residents say.

"It's a nice little town," Adcock said.

Tamaroa offers "country values" and its rural setting offers a "nice, slower pace," said Sam Chapman, one of the village's most famous residents.

Chapman and his late father, Clarence, were first featured in *The Southern Illinoian* doing their favorite pastime — waving. That story spawned similar stories on television and in magazines around the country.

Improvements have been made in the community in recent years. A long-sought water tower was built in the early 1970s. Streets have been improved. Adcock remembers when the mine contributed the town's only streets — made of mud and cinders.

WILLISVILLE

The town that roared

By Christi Mathis
Southern Illinoisan Correspondent

The tree-lined streets of Willisville usually are quiet — very quiet compared to rowdy days gone by.

Most of the 577 residents live in neat frame houses with well-kept lawns. Clothes hung out to dry flap in the wind in many back yards.

Not so many years ago, the peaceful village along Illinois 4 was a bustling, bawdy coal town.

Residents say Willisville was once called "Little Italy," because of the number of Italians who settled in the area, many to work in the mines.

In its heyday, the town had at least 1,500 residents and a two-fisted reputation.

The coal industry gave life to Willisville in the late 19th century. The town developed around a coal spur of the present Gulf, Mobile and Ohio Railroad. It took its name from Dick Willis, owner of the Willis Coal Co., which had two shafts in Willisville. The village incorporated March 5, 1900 with a population of 390 and over the next 20 years the population grew. The coal mines brought prosperity and all sorts of businesses to town.

Six large stone towers stand on the edge of town as a last lonely remnant of the mine dairy farm, reputed to be one of the largest dairy farms in the world in the early 1920s.

The mine also boasted a large hog barn with thousands of hogs and many Willisville homes were originally built by mine companies to rent to their workers.

The business district was several blocks long and included many saloons, several butcher shops, a theater, entertainment hall and a variety of other shops.

The mines that brought prosperity also brought occasional trouble.

"They claim at one time this place was rough, as bad as 'Bloody Williamson,'" said Mayor William "Tom" Spiller.

"Two or three folks got killed nearly every night," said Gus Tallo, owner of Tallo's Nite Club since 1941, perhaps slightly exaggerating.

Tallo said his father at one time owned a hotel and various other businesses as well as "probably half the houses in town," but had difficulty renting the houses as the town declined.

Tallo, who has spent his whole life in Willisville, said that when he was a child his mother didn't sleep at night and existed on a few winks caught during the day because she was afraid of the nighttime troubles.

"If you offended people, they shot you and put you on the train tracks to be run over," Tallo said.

Word has it that bootleg home brew ran rather freely in Willisville during Prohibition, contributing to the town's rough image.

According to legend, the miners went on a wildcat strike and never went back to work. Supposedly they shut down the water line to the dairy farm.

Regardless of how the shutdown came about, the mine closed in the mid-1920s, beginning a downward spiral for Willisville.

A flu epidemic in 1918 killed many residents. The mine was reopened later but the emphasis shifted to strip mining.

The town has stabilized during recent years, according to Spiller. Its streets now boast a grocery, two taverns, a post office, a lumberyard, several churches and a beautiful city park.

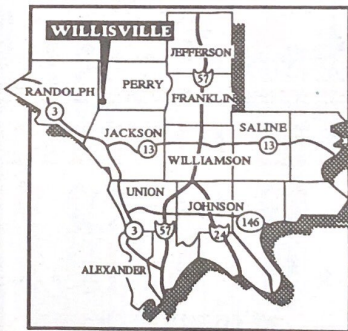
Most village residents work at World Color Press in Sparta or at Chester Mental Health Center, while some work for area mines or at Gilster Mary-Lee in Steeleville. Spiller said Willisville is now a "bedroom town in a lot of respects."

The town's few businesses are family owned and operated.

Doris Hepp, a lifelong resident whose husband, Ralph, operates the 4-way Stop Tavern, said business is "steady" and the couple is "making a living," but they have no other employees.



Quiet town: Barbara Jaimet manages Dee J's Country Store.



Willisville

Population: 577.

Incorporated: March 5, 1900.

Highlights: Named for Dick Willis, owner of the Willis Coal Co., which sank two shafts in the town near its time of inception. Annual Labor Day picnic sponsored by volunteer firemen and Women of Willisville. Nice large, shady city park with equipment.

However, Mike Salger, who has lived all his life in Willisville and works at World Color Press, noted Willisville is blessed with "good hometown people. You know everybody and everybody knows you. You don't have to lock doors."

Louise Hornbostel has spent all her 75-plus years in Willisville where her father, John Trucano — who did extensive historical research on the village — served as treasurer for 37 years and 11 years on the town council. Hornbostel echoed Salger's praises, saying, "I think we care about one another. We share garden stuff with one another. If there's sickness or death we don't just take up for flowers, we see that food's brought in and so forth."

Spiller said he doesn't see much chance of the town growing but hopes it can at least remain "status quo." He said Willisville is surrounded almost entirely by coal spoils or mine land, leaving no room for growth.